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The Etruscans and their Art

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MYSTERY surrounds the great nation of the Etruscans which, in the early centuries of the first millennium, founded the first advanced culture of Italy.

Etruscan can be read, since the letters are Greek. The meaning of some hundred words is known, but the language cannot be understood. Etruscan shows little relation to any well known language. There are few long texts; only ten contain more than thirty words. The words known are merely terms for titles, ages, dates and family relations, or are religious terms relating chiefly to dedications, sacrifices and burials.

The origins of the Etruscans are hotly disputed. About the year 1000 B.C., a dark period in the history of the Mediterranean was about to end. In the Western part of the Mediterranean, large tribes of Indo-Germanic peoples, coming, perhaps, from the region of the Danube, moved into Tuscany. Latecomers of the same stock settled in the Po valley. These invaders are today called Villanovans, a name derived from Villanova, the site where their culture was first recognized. The Villanovans had brought with them knowledge of agriculture and mining. They formed villages occupied by independent farmers who began to develop copper and tin mines, and thereupon to produce with considerable skill cast and hammered implements of bronze.

A picture of their life in Tuscany can be drawn from the sparse remnants of their settlements and from their numerous tombs. It would seem that their social structure was democratic and rustic in character and that there was little contact with the outside world. In art, we find a limited supply of ideas confined, in sculpture, to primitive figures of animals and men and, in the decorative arts, to conservative geometric motifs. The mode of life of the Villanovans is also preserved in the legendary history of early Rome. Livy records stories of shepherds and peasants quarrelling with their neighbors from similar primitive villages and living monotonous lives in a pattern strictly defined by stern religious traditions of community and family.

Into that life of the peaceful and moderately prosperous Villanovans, a violent change was brought about by the invasion of the militant, sea-faring Etruscans (850 B. C.?). Whence they came to Italy was a subject of speculation even in ancient times. Ancient Greeks and Etruscans themselves contended that their place of origin was Lydia in Asia Minor. A Greek historian of Roman times, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and many modern scholars as well, have doubted this tradition, suggesting that the Etruscans were natives

Cover. Bronze Situla from Bologna. Detail of the Middle Frieze. The warriors wear bronze helmets with a crest of feathers tied by a strap under the chin, oblong shields, and long spears with the metal spear-tips tied to the wooden shafts. Many helmets of this shape have been found in Etruria.



of Italy, or at least did not come by sea. American excavations in Sardis, the capital of Lydia, have shown that neither the language nor the culture of Lydia in the sixth and fifth century B. C. was identical with that of the Etruscans, although some remote similarities may be found. Thus there have been found in their supposed homeland, or elsewhere, for that matter, no certain traces of the Etruscans which antedate such traces in Italy. It is, therefore, almost a matter of personal decision whether or not we are to regard the Etruscans as immigrants from Asia. The writer believes that the sudden rise of Etruscan culture and its spread from the coast inland support the old tradition which pictures the Etruscans as invading sea-raiders.

The Etruscans had probably lived for some generations as a nation of pirates, for piracy was a trade which they practiced from the moment they landed in Italy. It is doubtful whether they had had much leisure at that stage to develop a sophisticated culture, but they seem to have had a taste for luxury. At their disposal were craftsmen, either native or captive, who were capable of imitating the much admired Phoenician work in jewels and ivory. They had no written language, for only after their arrival did they acquire an alphabet. Their religion consisted of remnants of Oriental practices, such as observation of thunderbolts, reading of the future in the livers of animals, and worship of a few old Mediterranean gods—the great mother goddess and the great thunder god. About things military, however, they had hardly anything to learn. They had war chariots, heavy armor, bows and arrows, swords and other advanced implements of warfare.

Taking on the hills along the coast strong positions which they could easily fortify with wooden palisades, the Etruscans quickly conquered the peaceful Villanovans who, in spite of superior numbers, were no match for the superior armament and better organization of the Etruscan knights. From the coastal cities of Populonia, Vetulonia, Marsiliana, Vulci, Tarquinia and Caere, the Etruscans pushed north, south and east. Some hundred years after their arrival they held sway over Rome, had entered the Apennines, and had approached the Gulf of Naples. Military exploits are a major topic in the Etruscan art of the seventh and the sixth centuries B. C. Engravings, reliefs, and vases show long phalanxes of warriors and also a military game called the "Troy" game. Terracotta revetments placed on temples depict war chariots and cavalry rushing into battle; and furious frays are waged up and down the slopes of the temple roofs by big terracotta warriors. Special devotion to the war god Mars is manifest in the innumerable dedications of energetic warriors (Fig. 1). The bronze situla (Fig. 2) shows us the Etruscan regulars with pot helmets (See Frontispiece) and their Italic auxiliaries in conical helmets (Figs. 3-b and 6) goose-stepping on a military expedition.

Within the conquered territories the Etruscans proved themselves able and energetic organizers. They founded actual cities, in sharp contrast to the mere villages and

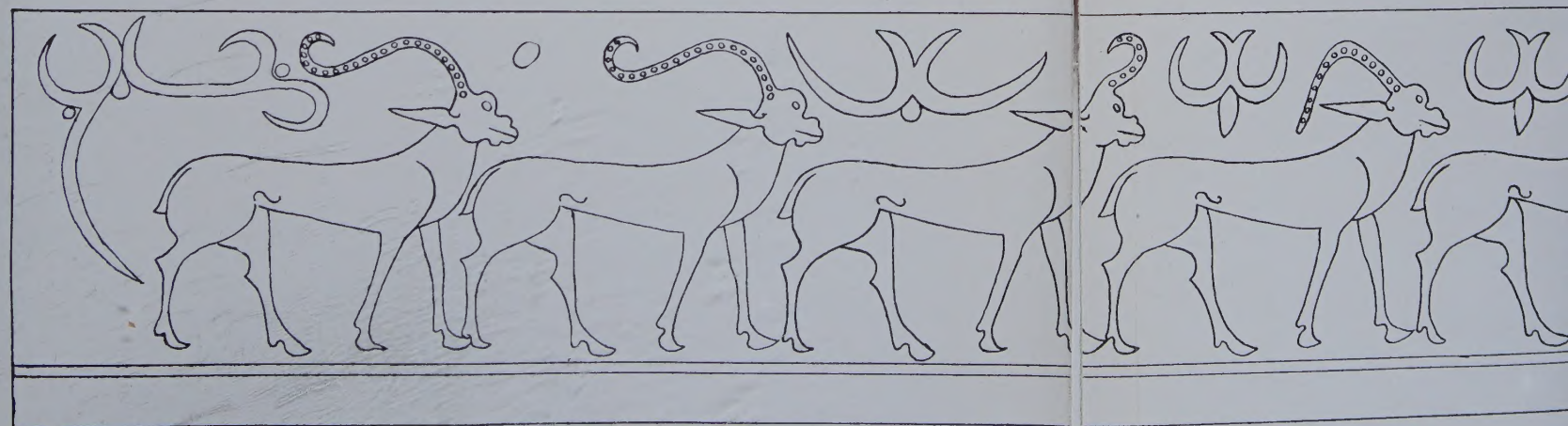
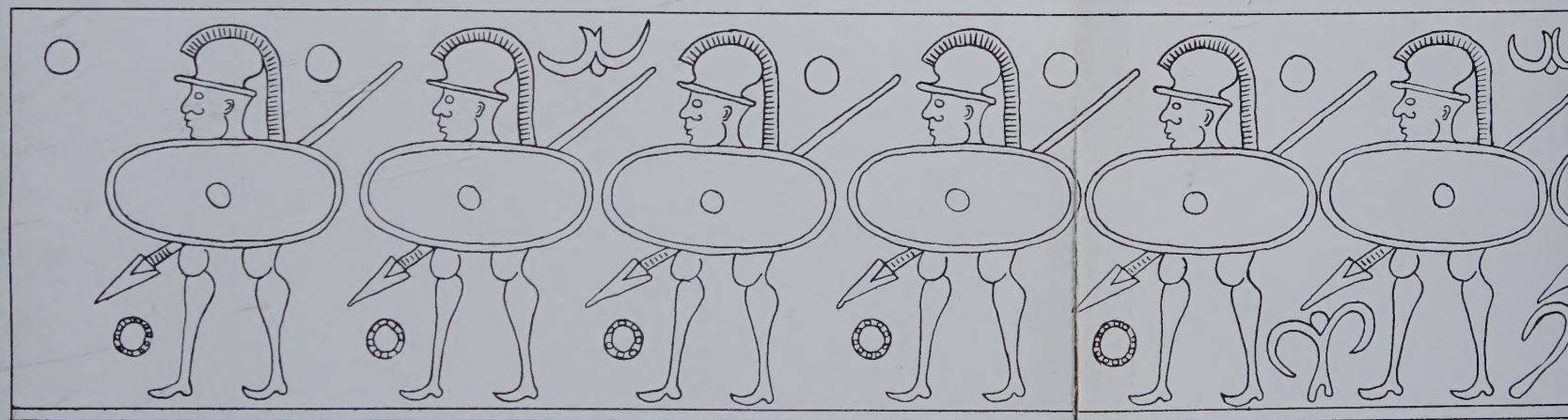
Fig. 1 Bronze Warrior. H. 9½". Other examples of this frequent type show that he wielded a spear in his right hand and protected himself with a shield in his left. His crested helmet is of an earlier type than those shown on the friezes of the situla (eg. 2). He wears an elaborately decorated cuirass over a short shirt and greaves. This is a bronze statue which was offered to a god, probably to the god of War. About 500 B.C. His elongated proportions, ultimately derived from early classical athletes, and his angular vigor distinguish him from his stocky but boneless and incoherent provincial cousins on the situla.

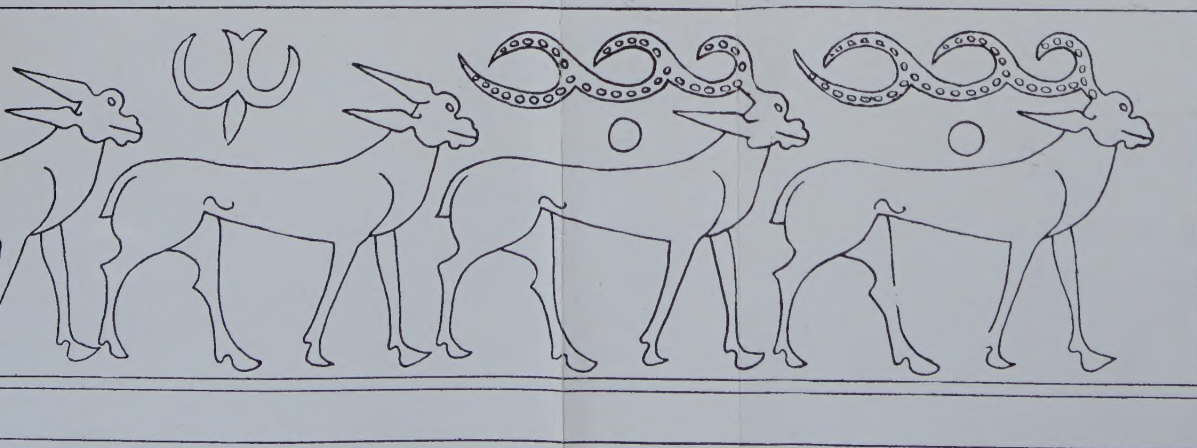
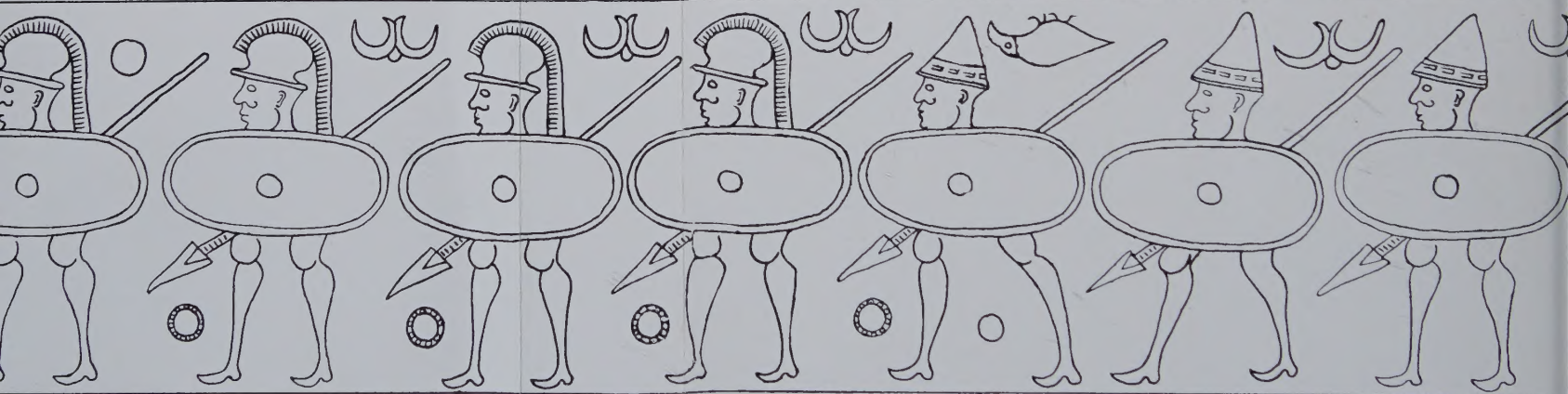
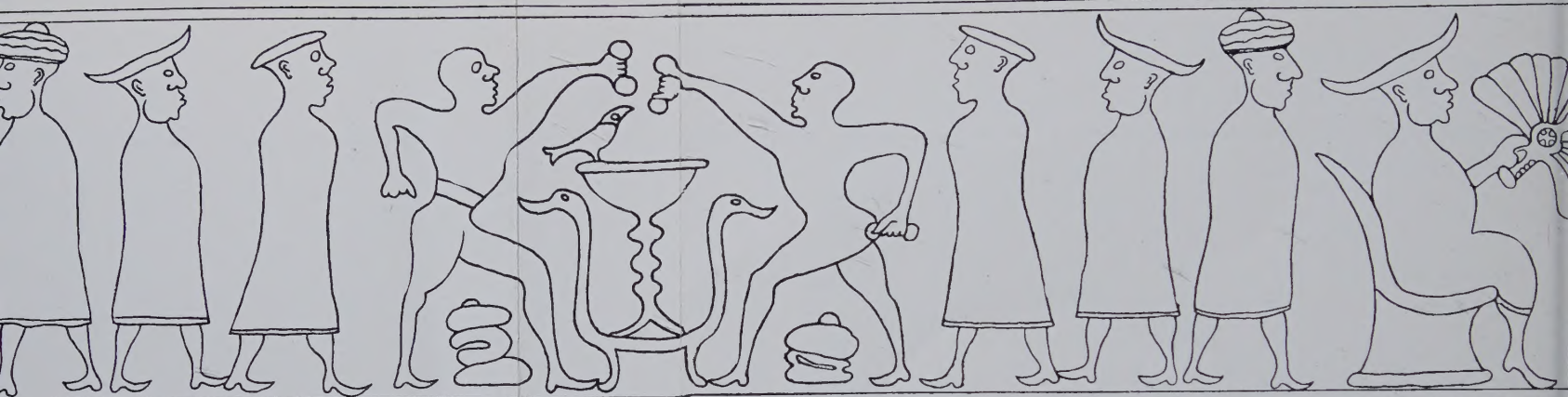
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Fig. 2 Bronze Situla from Bologna. H. 10-11/16". The body of the pail consists of a large sheet of hammered bronze riveted together on one side and wrapped on top and at the bottom around a ring of thick bronze wire.

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3a.



3b.

Fig. 3 Bronze Situla from Bologna. Drawing of the reliefs.



Fig. 4 Detail of the Upper Frieze. Two youths have put down their turbans and cloaks and swing with some effort metal weights (somewhat similar to modern dumbbells) which are tied to their wrists with leather straps. Between the two youths stands another wine bowl placed atop a bench which ends in birds' heads. One of the most competent scholars in the field of ancient athletics assumes that such scenes represent *boxing matches* and that the metal implements were used in fighting. Similar objects are seen in the hands of Roman boxers (J. Jüthner, *Antike* XV, 1939, p. 254). Similar boxers, wine-tasters, and animals are seen on the situla from Watsch (Pijoan, *Summa Artis* IV, 1934, Figs. 426-428).

hamlets of the Villanovans. Because the Etruscans utilized for their structures the great local resources of wood, little remains of these cities; but the few sites that have yielded material prove that the Etruscans did not lag behind the Greeks either in city planning or in sanitation. An Etruscan dynasty made a city-state of the various villages of Rome. Her citadel, her civic center, and her first sanitary constructions were also the work of her Etruscan rulers.

The government of the Etruscan states was in the hands of the conquerors who formed a ruling class of landed owners and manufacturers. These were entrusted with the civic and religious offices often mentioned in funereal inscriptions. The conquered Villanovans

supplied agricultural and industrial labor, and the cleavage between these two classes was never entirely overcome in Etruria. The rebellion which in 509 B. C. drove the Etruscan Kings out of Rome could easily have occurred in any other Etruscan city-state.

Agriculture formed the foundation of the Etruscan economy. In order to increase production, Etruscan landlords carried out vast reclamation and irrigation projects. The improvement of soil resulted in an increase of population, so that at the time of the Etruscan domination the small region around Rome is supposed to have had about 130,000 inhabitants. The Etruscans also introduced viniculture into Central Italy. The bibulous scenes that appear on the walls of Etruscan tombs and wine festivals such as that depicted in the upper frieze of the bronze situla (Fig. 3) leave no doubt that, by the middle of the sixth century B. C., local wines, ancestors of modern Chianti and Orvieto, enjoyed great popularity.

The Etruscans organized with new efficiency the mining of copper, tin, iron and,

Fig. 5 Detail of the Upper Frieze. Two musicians play pan-pipes composed of seven reeds. The artist correctly shows that the pipes are held obliquely while the musicians blow, but he has turned the pipes into profile view. In reality they were held in a horizontal position. These pan-pipes (*syrinx*) are favorite instruments of shepherds all over the world. In the center is a wine jar on a stand. The bird perched on the jar may be a musical pet or else it has perhaps some religious significance. Chairs of the type shown in this group have been found in Etruscan tombs. Note the fine incisions on hats, pipes, cloaks, and jar.





Fig. 6 Detail of the Middle Frieze. The conical helmet is represented in native sculpture of northeast Italy. These troops may, therefore, be native auxiliaries.

perhaps, even of silver. They had either brought with them, or had imported shortly after their arrival, craftsmen from the Orient who supplied the models for mass production upon which a host of native workers were launched. Soon Etruscan bronze and iron work gained reputation abroad. By the fifth century Etruscan bronze vases and torch-holders were being used by the Athenian aristocrats.

Among domestic industries, potteries held an important place. The Etruscan craftsmen evolved, on the basis of a native practice, the technique known as *bucchero*. (Figs. 8 & 9). The word originally signified ware found in holes (*bucche*), but is now generally applied to the beautiful, shining black ware produced by firing vases of clay mixed with ferrous oxides in a closed oven, a process of reduction resulting in a change of color from red to black. Along with love of jewelry and of fine vessels went that of furniture and textiles. These branches of decorative art were also organized in industrial fashion and were famous even in Roman times. Jewelers and goldsmiths of today still

look with envy upon the Etruscan handling of the difficult granulation technique.

If the Etruscans thus exploited with success the natural resources of Tuscany, they first opened a window into the outside world by promotion of foreign trade. The Villanovans had entertained no particular liking for the sea. The navigating Etruscans lost no time in putting to good use the Tuscan timber, famous as building material, for ships. The Greek historians write of the Etruscans as corsairs, but no amount of piracy could have brought to Etruria the multitude of Greek vases — many of them with perfumes and oil — and of other Greek objects found in Caere, Vulci, Tarquinia, Bologna, and, more recently, in Spina (modern Comacchio), the fountainhead of Etruscan trade in the Adriatic. The vases, provided with trade-marks which seem to attest entirely legal transactions, were obtained in exchange for Etruscan exports.

Greece was not the only region with which commercial relations were entertained. Etruscan objects have been found in Carthage and Marseilles. Trade with Phoenicia and Syria is attested by the presence of Phoenician silver in Etruscan tombs. Confused accounts of ancient writers seem to point to commercial relations with Spain, the main exports of which were corn and metal ore.

In addition to their overseas trade, the Etruscans profited by Transalpine trade with

Fig. 7 Detail of the Lower Frieze. All of these animals have camel-like heads and doe-like bodies but the horns are of four different kinds.



Fig. 8 Bucchero Cup on Stem. H. $6\frac{1}{8}$ ".
The stamped design shows a proces-
sional group repeated several times. It
is not clear whether a myth or a scene
of daily life is intended. Early 6th
century B.C. Mary B. Jackson
Fund, Museum of Art, Providence



Fig. 9 Bucchero cup adorned with
four bearded heads taken from
moulds. Early 6th century B.C.
Mary B. Jackson Fund, Museum of
Art, Providence

Germany and Austria whither they exported their bronzes. They also sold to the Celtic and German tribes small Oriental merchandise such as Egyptian and Phoenician glass beads. Eventually, the Etruscan script served as a model of the Runic script of the Germans.

Art blossomed quickly in the first centuries after the establishment of the Etruscan states (850-600 B. C.). There are many tombs of this early period in the form of trenches and chambers, less often, in the shape of a beehive. Most were rock-cut but, in some, masonry attests a mastery of stone construction. Curious stone stelae with life-sized figures mark the beginning of monumental sculpture. Painting in tombs and on vases developed a luxurious, if hybrid, style after Oriental and Orientalizing models. But the finest achievements of this period are not in monumental art but in smaller decorative objects, household utensils and personal adornments, metal work and jewelry. Nothing could better reveal Etruscan luxury and technical skill than the ornate gold safety pin (Figs. 10-11), a product of the most renowned Etruscan center of goldsmith work, the school of Vetulonia. Figures and ornament consist of globules (visible in Fig. 11) which, by a special process, have been soldered to the underlying hammered gold sheet. The effect of the glittering ornament and figures is mosaic-like, an effect enhanced by contrast with their background. This interest in optical effects is perhaps a Villanovan contribution since it is found in their bronzes.

The fibula is a miracle of precision; its four inches of length include no fewer than twenty-eight figures. Native Villanovan is the geometric pattern which runs atop the catchplate and over the back of the body. The main interest is with the fantastic demons and monsters of the Orient. On each side of the body a double-headed winged deity, wearing a crown, floats between a human-headed sphinx and a lion-like monster; below her and on the catchplate griffins, sphinxes, centaurs, horses, stags, and other animals disport themselves. This deity is the great Oriental mother worshipped by the Etruscans. The fibula illustrates the imaginative art of this early period when people not only painted monsters but believed in them. The freedom of arrangement is a sign of an early and experimental stage in a living and vigorous art.

The Etruscan society of conquering warriors was slowly transformed into a society of wealthy merchants. In their love of worldly pleasures, Etruscans of the sixth century B. C. may well be compared with the Venetians of the Cinquecento. Banquets, dances, music and hunts are the favorite subjects of representational art. This period, the greatest for the political power of the Etruscans, saw them turning for cultural inspiration away

Fig. 10 Granulated Gold Fibula. L.3 $1\frac{1}{16}$ ". Mid 7th century B.C.

Museum of Art, Providence





Fig. 11 Granulated Gold Fibula (Enlarged detail).

from the Orient toward progressive Greece. In religion, Etruscans had already assimilated many native Villanovan beliefs. Now, with a flexibility characteristic of many ancient pagan religions, they adopt almost the entire Greek mythology.

Art was, however, the field where Greek influence penetrated deepest and maintained itself most steadily. The imaginative urge of the Etruscans — a colonial feature — was so great, their technical skill so high, that at no other time had they approached Greek art so closely as in this archaic period (600-480 B. C.). Their work is similar not only in form but in spirit as well; for the spirit of archaic Greece was still moving at the level of an aristocratic feudal ideal which the Etruscans could understand and to which they could aspire.

The first outcome of the new cultural phase with its concomitant Greek influence is the rise of the monumental architecture and sculpture. From personal ornament emphasized by barbarians and parvenues when they are first acquainted with culture, emphasis shifts to temples and monumental tombs, to funereal and votive sculpture on a large scale, to monumental wall painting in tombs and temples. The rock-cut tombs develop from corridors or rooms into elaborate dwellings; wooden temples, gayly revetted





Fig. 13 Jumping Winged Horse. Detail from the Campanian urn.

with painted and sculptured friezes, rise by the dozen. Sphinxes, lions, or busts of the dead adorn and protect the tombs, while huge images of bronze and terracotta inhabit the dark cellas of the temples. The forms used are Greek entirely, or in part. Curiously, though monumental art arises under Greek inspiration, it retains more of a native character than do minor arts because Etruscans fail to follow the Greek lead in changing their architectural and sculptural material from wood, unbaked brick and terracotta to marble, in spite of the fact that the marble quarries of Carrara were within easy reach. In minor arts and painting, the materials used remained the same in Greece and Etruria. Furthermore, in the minor arts, Greek immigrants supplied models which could be immediately copied by their Etruscan assistants or competitors. No one would mistake an Etruscan for a Greek temple or fail to see the difference between an Etruscan life-size Terracotta and a Greek statue, but in smaller bronze figurines and reliefs, and in certain types of pottery, the difference is often difficult to establish.

Campanian bronzes, made in the region south of Rome, are an instructive example of the complex situation produced by Greek influence. The city of Capua was under

Fig. 12 Campanian Bronze Urn of the Capua Group: H. 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". D. 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Probably used as Funereal Urn. Body of vase and lid hammered: winged horses cast. Incised palmettes around body, incised tongue-pattern on the shoulder. Other vases of this kind are in Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Baltimore, and London. Early 5th century B.C. Cf. S. Reinach, *Rép. stat.* III, p. 217, 3.

Etruscan domination in the early fifth century, the time when the bronze urn with winged horses (Figs. 12-13) was made to house the ashes of some noble. Decoration and style linked it, however, with the provincial Greek bronzes of Southern Italy rather than with Etruria. An Etruscan Pegasus never jumped so lightly nor was ever rendered in such a combination of angular and fluid forms.

There are several replicas of the bucchero bowl adorned with a male head (Fig. 8). Of the bucchero cup adorned with a stamped procession (Fig. 9) and of the spear-swinging warriors (Fig. 1) there are dozens of replicas. The mass output which first assumes large proportions in this period of commercial prosperity is a curse of Etruscan art and craft. Repeatedly, a local school or workshop rises with brilliant individual achievements and then declines into mechanical repetition. Bucchero, for instance, started out with fine technique and individually executed designs, then proceeded to the mechanical method of decorating from moulds and stamps of inferior quality. Similar changes may be observed in later sculpture and in vase-painting. Artistic achievements on one side and a mass production on the other — is this cleavage caused by a difference in patronage? Did the best artists work for the aristocratic rulers, while the great mass of laborers and peasants, desirous of having the master's art, if only in a copy, were satisfied with cheap imitations? The lack of a stabilized middle class in Etruria seems to have some connection with the uneven quality of craftsmanship and taste.

Regional differences also add to the variety of Etruscan art. It is notable that several Etruscan cities develop distinctive types of sculpture and that figurative tomb painting is found only in a few sites; there are also great local differences in the types of tombs themselves. A most vigorous local dialect is spoken by the Bolognese artists. Bologna had remained a stronghold of the Villanovans down to the middle of the sixth century, its conquest by the Etruscans being subsequent by some three hundred years to that of Tuscany proper. The native element must have been rather prominent in this outpost of the Etruscans. The shape of the decorated bronze pail (Figs. 2-3) and the style of the decoration are in the native tradition. The interest in daily life, the exaggeration of personal characteristics amounting almost to caricature is akin to prehistoric drawing in northern Italy and to the little geometric figures which the Bolognese used to place on their vases before the advent of the Etruscans. In composition and anatomy, however, the reliefs of the *situla* are considerably more advanced than their Villanovan predecessors.

The vase is divided into three tiers, an element of order adopted from Greek or South Etruscan bronze reliefs. Quaint old-fashioned inventions impress the provincial artist. He fills empty surfaces with space-filling plants, a device abandoned by the Greeks some hundred years earlier along with the monsters and animals to whom he still assigns the lowest frieze (Fig. 3-c). We have met these orientalizing animals on the gold fibula (Figs. 10-11), but they have undergone a change. They are not wild and lively but stalk monotonously around the vase. The craftsman was satisfied to repeat the same animal nine times, changing only the headgear. The monsters have become mere ornament, but the people in the upper friezes are very much alive (Fig. 3a). In the upper frieze, which is divided into three groups, a merry company devotes whole-hearted attention to wine and music. The men who wear broad-brimmed hats or turbans

are, apparently, the Etruscan masters of Bologna; those wearing flat caps are perhaps their servants. Two women are present. In the center at either side of the wine jar a gentleman has dropped his clothes and is indulging in athletic exercises; in other groups winetasting is carried on with great dignity. This frieze is devoted to the joys of peace; below, (Fig. 3b) the Etruscan infantry marches to war, each soldier fully armed with spear, shield, and helmet.

There is nothing in Greek art to compare with this Bolognese Breughel. We have further testimony of his work or workshop in a bronze vase in Bologna. The vase in Bologna, the so-called Certosa Situla, was found in the same tomb with form-perfect imported Greek vases late archaic in style. Compared with them, the bronze reliefs of our vase must have looked to the Etruscans much as Indian representations of Europeans looked to Spaniards. The Etruscans preferred to be shown in idealized Greek fashion, as we may gather from representations of similar wine festivals in South Etruscan tombs where artists kept rather closely to Greek models. Soon the Etruscans in Bologna began to buy Greek art and the drastic Bolognese realism took refuge with Venetian and Alpine neighbors. Local art survived only on carved tombstones which, in spite of honest endeavor, retain a rustic flavor even when imitating Classic Greek models. The invasion of Gauls in the fourth century B. C. put an end to Etrusco-Bolognese art; yet, in its very decline, this art contributed its share to the formation of Celtic art.

The next period of Etruscan art and history (480-320 B. C.), corresponding in time to the Classical age of Greece, was marked by political setbacks. A change in mental outlook also seems to have taken place under the influence of religious cults and doctrines introduced from Greece and Southern Italy. A retrospective attitude toward the past, frequently met in declining cultures, produces the first historical pictures on Etruscan soil. The strings of titles in funereal inscriptions indicate a sterile hardening of social order and a vaingloriousness comparable to late Roman times. For art and culture this period is one of stagnation. This stagnation was, however, caused more by intellectual and psychological difficulties in assimilating an advancing Greek culture than by economic or political blows, for Greece in these years took strides which Etruscans could not match. The step from Anaximander to Socrates, from Aeschylus to Euripides, from Kanachos to Phidias could not be paralleled in Etruria. The Greeks achieved a unified vision of the universe based on a philosophy which sees the human being as a part of a unified, harmonious universe, a universe that obeys intelligible laws. Their artists represented the human figure as a symbol of this universe, as an entity of balanced organic forces constructed according to mathematical laws. The Greek temple, similarly, becomes a harmonious living unity, expressing by means of most careful architectural refinements, the tensions which result from the conflict of forces of weight and support. Greek painting becomes three-dimensional and responds to the scientific advance by its study of light and shade. None of these decisive achievements is fully understood by the Etruscans. In architecture, a few new details are adopted, but the temple continues to be a heavy, inelastic structure and remains unanimated by Greek refinements. In painting, a few new colors are tried and some feeble attempts at rendering of highlight and shadows are made but, basically, the



design remains flat and two-dimensional and the color-scale limited to flat tints. In sculpture, much skill is brought to bear, but even in the best imitations no more than a superficial similarity to Greek originals is ever attained (Fig. 22). A surface finish replaces the Greek organic coherence of individual forms and the radiating serenity of expression is replaced by imperturbably meditative calm.

A transitional period (340-230 B. C.), inaugurated by peace with Rome, sees the centers of Etruscan art shifting from the south and the west to the inland regions north and east. Etruscan contacts with Greece are now restricted to Greek colonies in Southern Italy and, conceivably, Athens. It is the South Italian continuation of Greek art of the fourth century — the energetic excited manner of Scopas and the lyrical manner of Praxiteles — that exercises the greatest influence upon the Etruscan sculpture of this period. Their counterparts among the great Greek painters exercised a similar influence upon Etruscan painting and engraving (Figs. 14-15). Outlook on life acquires a more realistic and more pessimistic character as the preference in subject matter shifts from idealized scenes of enjoyment to scenes of farewell, to life in the underworld, to demonology and such Greek myths as those which depict punishment and defeat. The difficulties encountered in imitation of Greek art are, however, gradually lessened as Greek art tends toward a more externalized expression of sentiment and passion. Such ideals were more easily grasped by the emotional Etruscans than the mathematically balanced harmony of soul and body created in the Phidian age. The most beautiful Etruscan portraits, large bronze heads of a boy and a priest, in solemn, pensive mood were done in this period.

Among the minor arts, engraving on metal, practised on mirrors and toilet-boxes, rises into prominence. Compared with Greek examples, Etruscan draftsmanship has a curious sketchy quality, heavy hesitant lines and flattened forms which have interested modern artists such as Picasso.

In the museum are two mirrors, one with Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt, riding on two stags, and showing an atectonic mode of composition:—figure and ornament merge into one surface pattern. The later mirror (Fig. 14) which exhibits Achilles, his mother Thetis and a divine figure named Achavizr (Personification of Love?) transforms the graceful rhythm and quiet charm of a Praxitelean design into heavy materialistic forms.

The bronze toilet-box (Fig. 15) is notable for the free and skillful adaptation of vegetable pattern and animal decoration to the shape of the object, but is weak in tectonic quality. The faltering lines below and above the figure frieze are hardly sufficient to set the figures off effectively against the surrounding ivy pattern. The figures reach out over the boundaries or push hard against them. Though the general rendering of human figures even in rather complicated attitudes has now been mastered, their postures are slightly lifeless while the repetition of certain motifs, such as the shapely bent leg, leads to an exaggerated angular rhythm. The purpose of the artist

Fig. 14 Bronze Mirror from near Fabriano. Achilles (Akhule), his mother (Thetis), a marine divinity, and a female goddess by name of Akhufesr are shown standing in front of a basin. Akhufesr, also known as Achavizr, is perhaps a goddess of love. The scene may represent Achilles learning the prophecy about his glory and his early death from Thetis, or else, being consoled by her after the death of his friend Patroclus. 3rd century B.C. (E. Gerhard, *Etruskische Spiegel*, V, pl. 122). Museum of Art, Providence



is to render the emotional significance of a figure, not to render a human figure as an organic unity coherent in every detail. This indifference to organic detail accounts for the schematic drawing of hands and feet, which are occasionally made too small, or even omitted; for the schematic drawing of drapery which is rarely shown as depending upon the action of the figure and often reduced to some simple formula. In spite of these shortcomings the drawing gives some idea of the quiet dignity of the Greek original and is vastly superior to the mediocre handle and feet.

The end of this period was the destruction of several centers of Etruscan culture and the virtual surrender of Etruscan independence to Rome. In the next and final period (230-80 B. C.) the cultural and artistic hegemony also passes to Rome. By the year 80 B. C. all Etruscan centers, with the exception of Perugia, had declined. The decline is slow, the process of Romanization gradual and the times, on the whole, peaceful for Etruria. The influence of Rome favors the native Italic element; in Caere, for instance, Latin inscriptions begin to outnumber the Etruscan, and by the end of this period, the Etruscan tongue becomes obsolete. In art, the huge sculptural output of Chiusi, Volterra and Perugia reflects often this revival of Italic elements in the linear treatment of detail, in the exaggerative portraiture, in the exploitation of details for contrast between light and dark. In painting, a similar tendency toward linearism and graphic technique may be observed and the gradual reduction of the color scheme, which sometimes leads to simple outline drawing, is a phenomenon of the same order. In architecture the popularity of the Italic atrium house dates, perhaps, from this period. The earlier phases of this period show, however, that the Etruscan tradition was still holding its own.

The development of Greek art in this Hellenistic period was propitious to its Etruscan imitators. The dynamic power and pathos, rendered so vigorously in the late Greek art of Asia Minor, found a ready echo in Etruscan artists whose temper rebelled against the restraint of Classical form. The tendency to emphasize loose handling of masses and momentary action was carried by the best Etruscan sculptors a step beyond their Greek models toward a Baroque ideal, especially in the congenial medium of terracotta. Architecture also made important progress — a development not infrequent in late phases of an art cycle. The increase of construction in stone and the appearance of more complex plans of houses and tombs are a logical outcome of a long development, but the introduction from the Hellenistic East of the true vault and arch would appear to signify the culmination of a truly Etruscan tendency toward an architecture of mass and curve which was already manifest in their early experiments with domed and vaulted structures. The decorative style used in architecture of this period includes luxurious combinations of vegetable and animal forms and seems again indicative of the Etruscan love of ornamental pattern.

Fig. 15 Toilet Box of Bronze, so-called Praenestine Cista. H. $6\frac{1}{2}$ ". Such boxes contained perfume flasks, mirrors, strigils and other cosmetic aids, and sometimes personal ornaments. They are often found in tombs. This box is mounted on feet of cast bronze adorned with crouching lionesses and the handle of the lid consists of a cast group of a satyr-boy and a nymph. The scene engraved on the body shows the preparations of a bride for a wedding; the god Hermes, characterized by his winged hat and his herald's staff, will lead her into the palace where an old dignified man and the bridegroom expect her. The topic chosen for the frieze and the motif of the handle indicate that the box may have been a wedding present. Early 3rd century B.C. Gift of Mrs. Gustave Radeke, Museum of Art, Providence



It is interesting that the Etruscans to the very last preferred to imitate the emotional though decadent art of the Greek East, which was already sinking into primitivism, rather than the strongly formalized but empty Neo-Classical style which arose in Athens in the late second century B. C. and did so much to shape the art of Rome. In this refusal to follow the revival of Classical art, they prove again their basically anti-Classic endowment.

The civil wars of the first century B. C. swept the last traces of Etruscan culture from the map of Italy. When order was re-established under Augustus, Etruria again became for a time the seat of artistic industries — Arretine vases were made in Arezzo and decorated terracotta revetments produced in Caere; but these Neo-Classic objects were manufactured by Greek artisans from Asia Minor and did not continue the native Etruscan traditions. Thus was concluded the first chapter in the history of Italian art.

Fig. 16 Candelabrum of Bronze. H. $36\frac{3}{4}$ ". The lights were attached to the central prongs of two flowers at the top which are now broken. This candelabrum imitates the shape of a column. The Etruscans first introduced candles into Italy and invented the candelabrum. Late 5th or 4th century B.C.

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II

IN our rapid survey of the *history* of Etruscan art, we have frequently referred to the art of Greece as the ideal of the Etruscans. Imitative from beginning to end, Etruscan art has been dismissed by some critics as a poor copy of the Greek while other art critics have divined in it deep revelations of the primitive soul. To achieve a more impartial stand we shall compare the two arts, taking into consideration not only the formal values but also the differences in culture and the part assigned to art in the life of each nation.

Let us take the last point first. In Greece, as well as in Etruria, the finest works of art were found in temples, sacred precincts, and tombs; but throughout Greek history spiritual emphasis and artistic eminence were dedicated to the service of the temple and precinct, the center of the Greek city-state. In Etruria, greater care was given to the tomb in which the dead nobleman with his family and servants continued his life. No large temples seem to be known which antedate Greek influence. Significantly, for temples and houses, the Etruscans were satisfied with perishable materials, but not for tombs. The city of the dead and its underground dwellings were planned as carefully as the real cities. Today, in the unforgettable cemetery of Caere, the city of the dead lives on; the city of the living vanished long ago. But there is proof in the scanty remains of their cities that the Etruscans did not place their art one-sidedly in the service of the dead.

The Egyptian notion of bestowing magic value upon the pictures in a tomb to insure continuous supplies to the dead seems to have been foreign to the Etruscans. The tomb in which the dead live was not sacrosanct; it might be re-opened to give to the dead the company of their relatives. Death was continuation of life; but life and after-life were seen in a more even balance than in Egypt where the scales inclined toward death, or in Classical Greece where they tipped toward life. Interest in mythology was common to Greeks and Etruscans, but in selecting topics from life they differed again. While the sphere of athletics with its heroic male youths was the focal point of Greek art, feasts, the hunt and religious ceremonies of luxuriously dressed aristocrats preoccupied Etruscan artists.

We have already indicated that the advance of Greek art and thought had put Greeks of the Classical age on a cultural plane entirely different from the Etruscans. It remains to diagnose this distinction, not forgetting that native Villanovan traits persisted in Etruscan culture as an undercurrent. In material aspects of life and in technical achievements, Etruscans were not inferior to Greeks but in intellectual development they always remained in a semi-archaic stage. The feudal, commercial aristocracy who ruled the city-states also formed the priestly hierarchy. In the few intelligible fragments of Etruscan writings which have come down to us religious, mythological, and intellectual notions are indiscriminately blended; they are litanies and prophecies pointing to a rudimentary stage of verbal expression and thought. We find no indication that the Etruscans had ever achieved tragedies comparable to those of Sophocles, philosophy



comparable to that of Plato, or science comparable to that of Euclid or Aristarchus of Samos. Their lack of intellectual progress was compensated by greater emotionalism, manifest in their passionate love of music and their devotion to religious practices. Under these conditions, with different objectives and a more primitive background, Etruscan imitations of Greek art, if regarded as copies, must be considered imperfect.

If we analyze the transformations which Greek forms suffered in Etruria, we see that they were the outcome of a primitive tendency. The Etruscans retained primitive materials when the Greeks advanced to marble. They retained archaic forms such as the wooden temple with open pediment belonging to a very early stage of Greek architecture. They retained two-dimensional painting in flat color surfaces. A primitive trend is also demonstrated by their lack of organization in design. They tended to omit in sculpture and painting the architectural frame which holds the composition together. They reduced complicated compositions to simpler schemes and shirked the difficulty of pedimental composition, placing their sculptures on the roof of the temple instead of the difficult triangle of the pediment. They found it difficult to clarify spatial relations. Thus they failed to develop a real relief style because this task demanded that the relation of figure and background be clarified. Instead, they placed flattened figures against the background as if they were statues in the round. In painting and drawing, they neglected to accentuate the essential lines and thus reduced the compositions to a homogeneous pattern. All these are primitive features. There are, however, many kinds of primitivism and the Etruscan kind is characteristic and different from imitations of Greek art attempted by other races.

A better understanding of Etruscan peculiarities may perhaps be achieved by a comparison of the most representative examples of Greek and Etruscan architecture, sculpture, and painting. We begin with architecture. The Classical Greek temple (Fig. 20) consists of a closed room, the cella, surrounded on all sides by the colonnade which forms a zone of limited space, rhythmically interrupted by the narrowly spaced columns. The slender entablature and roof carried by columns and the three-stepped podium restore the significance of structural solids below and above the columns. Thus a visible balance of structural solids and space is achieved in the exterior. The temple is set off as an organic unit against the surrounding landscape or the other buildings of the precinct to which it bears no architectural relation. The contrast of the vertical, slightly curved supporting columns and the horizontal entablature with its curved profiles makes the spectator realize at once the conflict of weight and support and the tension which results from this conflict. Like an archaic or a Classical statue, a Greek temple has four views, but unlike such a statue the temple does not betray from the outside any specific details about its plan or the arrangement of interior. Just as in Greek monumental tombs, the emphasis is on the exterior.

The Etruscan temple is always placed on a hill, sometimes, as at Orvieto, over a precipice. The Etruscan ritual demanded observation of natural phenomena and we

Fig. 17 Large Bronze Jar. H. 17". The cast handles are in the shape of human hands. Similar handles are known from Vulci and Pompeii. 2nd century B.C. A comparison with Figs. 1, 12, and 13 shows that the craftsmanship is less careful and detailed than that of the earlier pieces.

Mary B. Jackson Fund, Museum of Art, Providence



Figs. 18a and 18b

Etruscan Funeral Urn of stone in shape of a house. Archaeological Museum, Florence. This house-type developed out of a long one-room house with a pitched roof. The arched entrance is on the short side. The lower part of the house is built of masonry, the upper part apparently of wood. It has been suggested that the upper part represents a second floor gallery with pilasters. The incised pattern on the long side is taken by some archaeologists to represent a window, but by others the back of a bench. 3rd century B.C. (After D. S. Robertson, *Greek and Roman Architecture*, pl. 23.)

Fig. 18a

Fig. 18b



may perhaps recognize in this choice of location a rudimentary attempt to correlate the appearance of the sacred structure to the landscape, for many Etruscan rock-cut tombs adapt themselves to the landscape, while the tumuli (earth mounds) constructed over other types of tombs rise like natural hills out of the terrain.

The exterior of an Etruscan temple (Fig. 21) never achieves the organic balance of the Greek but appears "heavy-headed, lowly, and sprawling." The four sides are not similar as in Greece; the front, which alone offers access to the high podium, is strongly emphasized. Different also is the relation of space and solids. The Etruscan temple consists of a huge porch in front and a room in the rear, often subdivided in three parts. This three-fold division is un-Greek. It is paralleled in pre-Greek Lemnos where inscriptions close to Etruscan have been found, in Cyprus and in the modern Oriental *liwan* house. Unlike the Greek, the Etruscan temple has no surrounding colonnade. Viewed in profile, the massive limiting walls of the sanctuary proper contrast sharply with the space under the porch which is only feebly interrupted by the widely spaced, short columns. The Etruscan temple also lacks the clearly defined outlines of the Greek. Space intrudes into the open pediment, the roof bulges out into space far beyond the side walls and the statues of the roof attempt to extend the silhouette of the building into the sky. The Etruscan temple reflects more of its plan in its exterior than the Greek; the columns of the porch are placed in lines that continue the walls of the three rooms in the rear. The Greek temples were built usually of one material, preferably marble, and colors were used only to clarify the relation of the various architectural parts. In the Etruscan wood-built temples, color dominated. Colored terracotta revetments were applied over unbaked bricks and wood. Thus, the actual structural material is dissociated from the surface material which defines the visual impression.

In their domestic and funereal architecture, the Etruscans show a remarkable interest in curvilinear forms such as the dome, vault, apse — forms, which tend to produce a continuous unified space. In primitive solutions, all these forms are represented in early Etruscan tombs and arched doorways and windows used in Etruscan houses of the sixth and seventh centuries B.C. In Greece, no marked interest in arches and vaults appeared until the advent of Hellenism when the Greeks brought to perfection the true arch and vault and, in turn, handed them over to Etruria (Fig. 18a). It is significant that the early experimental forms in Etruria were related to the pre-Greek architecture of the Aegean and that they were gradually displaced by the lintel and post forms derived from Greek architecture. The introduction of the true vault and arch into Etruria caused a Renaissance of Etruscan architecture. An Etruscan palace of this period has a remarkable similarity to the Florentine palaces of the early Renaissance (Fig. 18a).

In our comparison we have dealt with Etruscan architecture as a whole, for Etruscan and Italic features were already strongly fused when Greek influence upon Etruscan architecture set in. There can be no doubt however, that in domestic architecture the Villanovans had made a real contribution. House types are influenced by climate to a much greater extent than temples or tombs and the Villanovans had already evolved house types suited to the climate of Tuscany when the Etruscans arrived. The popular pitch-roofed house and the atrium house with its opening in the roof over the central hall both stem from a Villanovan type of rectangular wooden structure. Only some innova-



tions in plan and in the handling of the building material are Etruscan. Also native Italic seems the rigid logic apparent in the symmetry of Etruscan house-plans and in the military line-up of temples and tombs along one straight line, which is a type of planning that implies the intention to impose architecture upon, rather than to assimilate it to, landscape.

In sculpture, if we want to compare truly representative examples, we should select a Greek marble statue and an Etruscan painted terracotta (Fig. 22). Nothing shows the Etruscan love of uniform, softish mass better than their failure to use marble in sculpture, although Greek marble statues were imported to Etruria and the quarries of Carrara were close at hand. The effect of Etruscan statues is based on the use of an inert mass overlaid by pattern-like motifs which may be either flatly modelled surface pattern, graphic incisions, or painted ornaments; this contrasts to Greek sculpture in which *sculptural* detail dominates and forms the outward expression of the way in which the whole statue is constructed. Underpaint and color cover an Etruscan terracotta much as polychrome terracotta revetments cover the wood and brick structure of the Etruscan temple. The Etruscans were eager for expression and movement, and in this eagerness often violated rules established by Greek sculptors for the relation of statue, space, and spectator. They often tried to make things "real" in the naive sense that statues of dogs or children placed in our gardens are "real." Just as Oriental art oscillates between the calm dignity of processional scenes and detailed action of historical accounts, so in Etruria does the interest in dynamic and brutal scenes alternate with scenes of tranquil enjoyment.

The Italic, Villanovan tradition is distinguished by the love of angular and "cubistic" forms and by a graphic, linear conception of details. It has long been recognized that the keen interest in the characteristic, the materialistic touch in the rendering of human physique, the primitive delight in angular, energetic action must be connected with the Italic strain in Etruscan art (Fig. 1). Both principles operative in Etruscan sculpture—the Etruscan (pattern over mass) and the Italic (added geometric forms)—are vastly different from the Greek conception of sculpture as an active, three-dimensional structure composed of sculpturally modeled parts which are united by the tension of organic movement.

In painting (Fig. 19) more than in any other field, the lack of surviving Greek monumental pictures makes comparisons hazardous. Etruscan painting shows little development; in general, it was confined to two-dimensional coloring of surfaces on an abstract basis. The Greeks began with the same stage but they moved on to the use of local color, of light and shade, of three-dimensional design. A constant difference is that in Greek painting the figures are sculptural, are energetically defined, and suggest a certain amount

Fig. 19 Etruscan Wall Painting. Detail from the Tombs of the Leopards, Tarquinia. Fresco technique. The young couple reclining on a couch is playing a game. The boy holds a ring in one hand and a wine bowl in the other hand. On the left a servant boy is going to get some wine. Laurel plants indicate that the feast takes place in the open air. According to an old convention, men are represented in dark reddish brown, women in the yellowish color of the background. The cloak of the woman is red with a green hem, that of the youth, white and blue. Both wear green wreaths. Compare this refined festival with the rustic feast of the *situla*, Figs. 2-7. Early 5th century B.C.

Photograph courtesy of Professor P. Duell

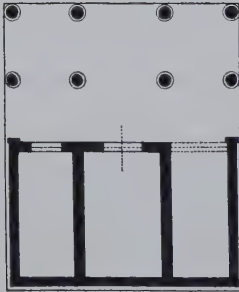
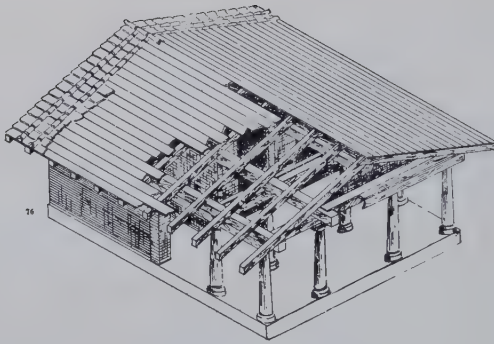
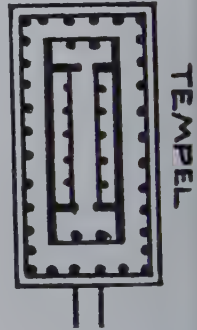


Fig. 20 Reconstruction of a Greek temple
(Temple of Aphaia in Aegina (Furtwängler, Aegina,
pl. 36).

Fig. 21 Reconstruction of an Etruscan temple
based on a description by Vitruvius (Ducati, following
Wiegand, in: Storia dell' Arte Etrusca 1927, Tav. 23).



of depth, whereas the Etruscans aimed at a decorative distribution of colored surfaces and paint figures only loosely defined by broad outlines. The fluent action of Greek figures is often translated into a graceful mannerism.

The native Italic contribution is not very apparent in painting but Italic taste dominates in engraving of mirrors and boxes (Figs. 14-15). The delight in changing light and shade takes here a graphic form in the change of hatched lines and shining surfaces. It is significant that the *Italic* town of Praeneste leads in this craft.

III

ETRUSCAN art, then, must be regarded as a hybrid mixture; or, from the Greek point of view, as a barbarized, colonial version of Greek art; or, from an objective point of view, as the art of a people basically anti-Classical in their mental outlook and artistic endowment, who fought an uneven struggle to appropriate the Classical harmony of Greek humanism.

Obviously, Etruscan art cannot be judged in the same class as arts completely unified and original. It is fairer to compare the Etruscans with their contemporaries who also succumbed to the Greek spell, the Phoenicians, the Iberians, the Lydians, the Phrygians, and even the Scythians of South Russia. Most of these have never been able to produce more than a few works of art at all comparable to the Greek; none of them managed to keep up their emulation of Greece consistently for a long time, unless they came under actual political domination of the Greeks. Cyprus shows in its continuous absorption of Greek culture some analogies to Etruria, but Cyprus became a Greek island and besides "unlike Cypriote sculpture the Etruscan is no lifeless imitation of a foreign fashion" (Pryce). Etruscans alone of these ancient nations have succeeded in following Greek art for six centuries and in approaching in their best achievements its formal qualities.

Here the question may well be asked: "Would the Etruscans not have done better to apply their great enthusiasm for art in an independent way instead of becoming infatuated with Greece?" To this the Etruscans themselves would probably reply that through imitation of Greece, theirs had become the leading culture of Italy. Looking at the problem from the artistic point of view, we must reply that Classical art has always exercised an irresistible appeal upon arts less developed. The very conflict and tension between Greek, Etruscan, and native Italic elements imparts a dramatic interest to Etruscan art, an interest paralleled in later periods of European art history when Italian and French influence in Germany or Spain produce analogous critical situations. Was it this conflict of emotional tendency and Classical form that attracted Michelangelo to the art of the Etruscans?

We come finally to the historical significance of Etruscan art and culture in the development of Rome. In the earliest period, politically, economically, and artistically, they were indistinguishable. The very name of Rome may be Etruscan. Etruscan blood ran in the veins of many noble families and the importance of this racial heritage for Rome is apparent even later in such Etruscan descendants as the proverbial Maecenas and the poet Persius. Long after political and economic influence had waned, Etruscan forms persist in religion and arts. The most impressive forms of state representation such as the throne and lictors of the Roman magistrate and the solemn ceremony of triumph are Etruscan. A vast body of religious practices had also come to Rome from

Etruria. Prophecy from the liver of animals was reserved to Etruscan priests who formed an official priest-guild in Rome. Observation of omina, foundation rites, and gladiatorial games contain Etruscan elements. Such features of Roman architecture depend upon religious practices as the plan of the temple, certain features of city planning connected with foundation rites and many monumental forms of tombs are also Etruscan. We have demonstrated before how Roman architecture became an architecture of mass and space following principles timidly anticipated in Etruscan.



Fig. 22 Terracotta revetment (decorative roof-tile) from an Etruscan temple. Fragmentary. 5th century B.C. Height: 8¼". A similar head is said to have come from Tarquinia. (E. D. Van Buren, *Figurative Terra-cotta Revetments*, 1921, p. 22, n. 2).

Compare also the antefix from Sarteano. (Copenhagen, *Bildertafeln der Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek*, 1928).

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In painting and sculpture the situation is somewhat different. Roman and Etruscan sculpture are practically identical until the second century B.C., but in the years 200 to 50 B.C. Rome achieves an assimilation of Greek sculpture which carries her way beyond the Etruscans toward the new Classicism of Augustus. In the same period Latin literature, always imitating Greek models, advanced from the rude translations of Livius Andronicus to the stylistic perfection of Cicero. What survives of the Etruscan sculpture are the *types* — the toga statue, the equestrian statue, the traditional images of some

gods; some compositional schemes of architectural sculpture; and a few compositions concerned with after-life. Stylistic traits resembling Etruscan appear sporadically in relief and portraiture, but there is little real continuity except, perhaps, from the latest Etruscan to the provincial art of Northern Italy.

The Etruscans have contributed in three ways to the greatness of Rome. Politically, they have helped Rome to become a state; racially, they have enriched the Romans with qualities which this sturdy peasant stock would otherwise have lacked — imagination, enthusiasm for life, religious fervor; artistically, they transmitted knowledge of Greek art and culture to early Rome and bequeathed to the Romans many monumental forms to which the Romans conservatively clung. Artistic influence of more subtle character may have been transmitted through racial heritage — the feeling for decorative color, for impressive mass, for Baroque excited scenes, for pompous representation of ceremonies. As educators of the Romans, the Etruscans have contributed their share to European culture. As the first Italic nation which rose from the Prehistoric craft to monumental art, they have opened the glorious story of artistic achievement which leads to Tuscan Romanesque, to Michelangelo, to Bernini.

The Inscription on the Bolognese Situla

by J. Whatmough, Harvard University



Fig. 23

The inscription on the rim of this situla (Figs. 2 -7) may be transcribed as follows:

Fig. 24a

lekia^vstikaian·in m·ei:vatnise

Fig. 24b

XX

in which the two uncertain letters are marked by a dot beneath them. The photograph will give some idea of the general appearance of the writing as it begins (on the left) near to one of the two hooks of the handle and continues (towards the right) almost half of the way to the other hook (with a space between *-in* and *m·ei:*). But it shows only the upper parts of the letters, the rest being out of sight beneath the curved edge of the rim. And it does not show the marks which stand just before the second hook of the handle. In the copy of the inscription these latter symbols are given separately (24b); they most probably are numerals, no doubt a mark of capacity. The interpuncts, in the original, are not mere dots, but short oblique strokes, placed within or across the letter-strokes.

In the inscription (24a) we appear to have first two proper names *lekia^v* and *kaian*, the former followed by a particle *-ti*, known from other Etruscan documents, apparently

with the sense of "connected with, belonging to, in" (*crapsti, unialti*); the latter followed by another particle *-in*, also known in other Etruscan documents (*tinsin, Θesnin*), apparently with the sense of a connective. These two particles have been discussed most recently by K. Olzscha, *Klio*, Beiheft 40 (N.F. 17), 1939, pp. 18ff., 175ff. The first part of the inscription would then mean: "(This situla is the property of, was made for) *lekie* and *kaian*" or the like.

Next we have *m·ei*·, which may be conjectured to be a variant of the Etruscan word written commonly *mi* but sometimes *me*, a demonstrative meaning "this" or "I". Is it not conceivable, then — but this is only a guess — that the word *vatnise* which follows gives us the name of the artist who designed or executed the situla? The second half of the inscription, in that case, would mean "This (is work to the credit of) *vatni*."

This name would be connected with the Etruscan name *vati*, and with the Latin name *Vatinius*, which is in fact itself of Etruscan origin, as was proved by W. Schulze, *Zur Gesch. d. lat. Eigennamen*, p. 249. Apparently there is no word present to mean "pail, situla."

The letters were incised with a chisel or similar tool. They belong to an early form of Etruscan alphabet, not indeed the earliest known, but a short step from it towards the standard alphabet in which the great mass of Etruscan inscriptions are written; their date agrees well with that assigned on other grounds for the manufacture of the situla itself. They also give us a new and valuable link between the early Etruscan alphabets and the "Sub-Alpine" alphabets, which have recently assumed great importance, since we now know that upon them were based certain Runic letter-forms (see F. Altheim and E. Trautmann, *Vom Ursprung d. Runen*, 1939).

Fig. 24a'



Fig. 24b'



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The sister piece of the bronze situla in this Museum is reproduced and discussed by R. Randall-MacIver, *Villanovans and Early Etruscans*.

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